Clarion Review

General

Voices Hidden in the Valley
Melchor Rosario
Lulu
978-0-9711737-4-3
Four Stars (out of Five)

This collection of eighteen very short stories are for the most part introspective reveries with a handful structured as new folktales suitable for campfire gatherings. The settings are presumably author Rosario's native Dominican Republic although the stories mention few details anchored in a specific location. The existential language is often poetic and dreamlike. "… his voice was different conceptual irresistible loaded with white melancholy…" With these words Melchor Rosario inadvertently makes a fair assessment of his own style in *Voices Hidden in the Valleys.*

The author's previous books of poetry and prose include *Voces Arran Lo Eternal* / *Voices Claw the Eternal* and *Cartas Que Nunca Envie y Algunos Poemas Grises*. Translator Amaya Price has rendered smooth English while retaining a certain amount of the original sentence order for authenticity's sake.

Two stories which diverge from the dominant themes of fate tenacity loss and unsettled guilt are quite successful. Both are taut with direct language and original subjects*. "*A Gray Look" is a particularly creepy tale which seems quiet at first but builds rapidly. Readers may feel a chill when they reach this line:

> *…I should always bring a strong shovel with me in case another look blocks the road.*

The very brief "Bewitchment of Age" features an apt credibly constructed unnamed young female protagonist whose line of fateful thinking rings true. Rosario has laid out simple ingredients for her possible doom but lets her choose to create it herself. Another notable piece is "Letter For A Ghost":

> *Nothing is ordinary in this life. Everything has a spark of madness*
> *a white flame that makes us hear magical voices singing miseries*
> *in C-Major.*

There are numerous such standout lines and Rosario likes to finish his stories with carefully chosen parting shots some of which alter in hindsight the true nature of the piece. The author sticks a bit too loyally to a clutch of favorite words related to affect such as “ecstatic” and “melancholy.” The atmospheric tone generally works but there may be too much overlap in mindset from one story to the next.

This book is no Dominican travelogue it is flashes in the synapses. Those who appreciate inward-reaching insight and fast sketches which impart meaning beyond that which is stated in print will find *Voices Hidden in the Valley* to be worth the read.

Todd Mercer